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AUTHOR Asprea, AnnaMaria; Betocchi, Giulia Villone
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ABSTRACT

This study of moral judgment among young Italian school children reports differences between individual and group judgments. Laboratory and projective techniques were devised to study judgments, perceptions of fairness, motivations and suggestions for restoring equity among a sample of children between 5 and 9 years of age. Subjects were 12 middle and high middle class children who were neither overachievers nor underachievers. In the laboratory condition, subjects in groups of four were given a drawing task and a task criterion (draw the most and prettiest). After 20 minutes the task was interrupted and the three oldest children were required to decide individually how to allocate a reward among task group members. The three were then brought together to negotiate the actual distribution of rewards. In the projective interview condition, the children were individually shown a picture of five children in a situation similar to the drawing task setting. The child was asked to judge the equity of awarding the reward to each of the pictured children, who varied in age, sex and task achievement. In addition to group and individual judgment differences, age differences were found. Younger children used an achievement criterion for distributing rewards. Older children indicated a protection motive for reward distribution. (Author/RH)

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AnnaMaria Asprea
Cattedra di Psicologia dell'Eta' Evolutiva
Universita' di Salerno, Italy

Giulia Villone Betocchi
Cattedra di Psicologia
Universita' di Salerno -Italy

"Continuity of Child's Moral Development : A Cognitive Approach "

Abstract

In the frame of reference of the equity theory and of those researches concerning children's development of social knowledge,we have examined some particular moment of their moral development.

Four groups of four children each have been studied. The experimental setting included: laboratory study and picture interviews. During the laboratory study each group was given a drawing task and the performances of each child were being jugded according to fixed criteria. The children were individually asked how to distribute a ten candies reward. Finally, the group was invited to reach a common decision about reward distribution.

During the picture interview , children were asked , individually, to judge about the equity of five hypothetical situations in which a child was being rewarded in situations similar to that just experienced in the laboratory study. Criteria for rewarding included merit, age, and sex. In case of judgement of iniquity, children were being asked to suggest devices for restoring equity.

Younger children seem to accept only merit criteria, old ones admit other criteria such as protection toward the younger child. Data confirm what is known in literature about continuity in moral judgement.

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A.M.Asprea

Cattedra di Psicologia dell'Eta' Evolutiva
Universita' di Salerno - Italia

G. Villone-Betocchi

Cattedra di Psicologia
Universita' di Salerno - Italia

"Continuity of Child's moral development : a cognitive approach"

Foreword

The experiment we are here reporting is part of a larger experimental design meant to study children's development of social knowledge, with particular attention to moral judgement. Within the frame of reference of Piaget's and Kohlberg's theories (Piaget J., 1932; Kohlberg L., 1969) we have attempted to study some aspects of positive justice behaviour in equity and non-equity situations.

As a matter of fact, according to Walster's formulation of equity theory, any person will experience distress in front of non deserved outcomes, or after injuring or damaging another. Hypothetically this is due to fear of retaliation and to threat to self esteem, both finding their roots in the process of socialization, (Walster E., Berscheid E. and Walster G.W., 1973, in Berkowitz L., Walster E. 1976).

Methodology

In assessing methodology our concern was :

- the defining of the particular section of social behaviour to be studied, i.e. moral judgement.
- the individuation of such experimental conditions that might be "interesting, comprehensible and realistic " (Damon W., 1977).

Therefore we have designed the following experimental setting:

a) Laboratory study

Four groups of four children each have been examined. Each group was brought into a room with the researcher, and put around a table with four piles of papers, four boxes of colored pencils at disposal. The children were invited to make drawings with the following instructions: " Try to make the most and the prettiest". After 20' the drawing session was interrupted and the children were separated, the youngest of the group, which was constantly a child not older than six, was

thanked, secretly rewarded with two candies, and sent back to his classroom. The drawings of the remaining three children were counted up, and the experimenter wrote on a portable backboard the following sentences:

"most and prettiest" (near the name of the child who actually did the most and prettiest drawings);

"the oldest boy (or girl)" (near the nname of the oldest child);

"the youngest child" (near the name of the youngest child);

"nice drawings" (near the name of the fourth child).

The three children are then taken out from the room and brought back one at a time. As each is brought back, he is told that the experimenter has admired the drawings and that, as a reward, the group will receive ten candies. Each child is asked for a decision as how to distribute the ten candies in the group , taking into account also the youngest child who has been previously sent back to his classroom. Then the three children are brought back as a group and given the following instructions: "Here are the ten candies, now decide how to distribute them". All actions and reasoning of the children , both in individual and group session. have been recorded.

b) Picture interview

In order to investigate children's knowledge of positive justice, together with their reactions to iniquity, we have elaborated a projective technique with five hypothetical situations. A picture card representing four boys and a girl, very schematically drawn, was being shown to each child separately. The researcher told the child that, in situations similar to that just experienced by him. the reward had been given, in turn, to : a) the child who drew the most and the prettiest drawings; b) to the oldest boy; c) the youngest child; d) the child who made nice drawings; e) the girl "because she is a girl".

In each situation the child was asked to judge the equity of the chosen criterion, to give the motivations of his judgement, and, in case of a judgement of iniquity, to suggest his devices for restoring equity, in case of himself being

unfairly rewarded, and in case of himself being unfairly non rewarded.

Subjects of the experiment

Subjects of the experiments were children belonging to middle and high middle class; coming from the same school; aged from 5 and 6 months to 8 and 11 months. Under and overachievers have been excluded.

Results

Results are here reported on a twofold level :

- data obtained through the experimental procedure;
- data obtained through the " picture interview ".

Within the experimental condition data, we take into account two main features: the individual and the group judgement.

Through the "picture interview" we have examined : the perception of fairness or unfairness of the hypothetical situations submitted to each child; the motivations for his perception; the suggestions in order to restore equity, in those cases in which they had acknowledged an unbalanced situation of iniquity.

Table I

Individual judgement

He deserves more because:	N. of Ss.
a) He made more drawings and the prettiest	5
b) He is the oldest one	0
c) He is the youngest one	3
d) He made nice drawings	1
e) a + c	2
f) Sharing among all children is being suggested	1
Tot.	12

Here merit criterion is being aknowledged by half of the children and by the majority of them when in combination with other criteria. When the distribution of rewards is being reached in group, merit criterion by itself is no more pointed out. In such experimental condition reward to the youngest child is being privileged:

merit does not seem to keep its value/.

Table II

Group judgements

He deserves more because:	N. of Ss.
a) He made more drawings and the prettiest	0
b) He is the oldest one	0
c) He is the youngest one	3
d) He made nice drawings	0
e) a + c	6
f) Sharing among all children is being suggested	3
	tot.12

We are now taking into account data coming from the "picture interview" according to the five hypothetical situations submitted to each child. As said before, during the picture interview, each child is confronted with the hypothesized situation of a group different from his own, in which a child has been rewarded on the basis of this matching with each of the possible situations ("he made the most and the prettiest " (a); "the oldest boy" (b); "the youngest child" (c); "nice drawings" (d); Further, there is a fifth hypothesized situation in which a girl deserves a reward just for her being "a girl". Each submitted situation may be defined by each child as an equity or iniquity condition. In cases of non equity perceived the child would be asked about his suggestions in order to restore equity. Iniquity condition was hypothesized in both ways: child being unfairly rewarded, child being unfairly non rewarded.

Table III

Reward to the child in sidtuation (a)

fair	unfair	doubtful	
Ss. N.	Ss. N.	Ss. N.	Tot. Ss.
9	2	1	12

Table IV

Motivations for defining equity or iniquity

Criterion	Ss. N.
Merit	8
Protection	0
Aknowledgement of power	0
Criterion rejected	2
No answer	2
tot.	12

Table V

Equity restoration

Subject has been "unfairly" rewarded.		Subject has been"unfairly " not rewarded .
Ss. N.	Suggestions	Ss. N.
0	He denounces it	0
0	" keeps silent	0
/	" imposes distribution	2
/	" asks rewards for himself	0
2	" shares	/

Table XII

Reward to the child in situation (b)

Fair	Unfair	Doubtful	
Ss. N.	Ss. N.	Ss. N.	Tot. Ss.
2	10	0	12

Table XVII

Motivations for defining equity or iniquity

	Ss. N.
Merit	0
Protection	0
Aknowledgement of power	1
Criterion rejected	10
No answer (DK)	1
	12

Table VIII

Restoration of equity

Subject has been "unfairly" rewarded		Subject has been "unfairly" not rewarded
Ss. N.	Suggestions	Ss. N.
/	He denounces it	2
/	" keeps silent	2
/	"imposes distribution	6
/	" askes rewards for himself	9
/	" shares	/
1	No answer (DK)	1

Table IX

Reward to the child in situation (c)

Fair Ss. N.	Unfair Ss. N.	Doubtful Ss. N.	Tot. Ss.
6	5	1	12

Table X

Motivations for defining equity or iniquity

	Ss. N
Merit	0
Protection	5
Aknowledgement of power	0
Criterion rejected	5
No answer (DK)	2
Tot. Ss.	12

Table XI

Restoration of equity

Subjects has been "unfairly" rewarded Ss. N.	Suggestions	Subject has been "unfairly" not rewarded Ss. N.
/	He denounces it	3
/	" keeps silent	0
/	" imposes distribution	1
/	" asks reward for himself	1
5	" shares	/

Table XII

Reward for the child in situation (d)

Fair	Unfair	Doubtful	
Ss. N.	Ss. N.	Ss. N.	Tot. Ss.
10	1	1	12

Table XIII

Motivations for defining equity or iniquity

	Ss. N.
Merit	10
Protection	0
Aknowledgement of power	0
Criterion rejected	1
No answer (DK)	1
	12

Table XIV

Restoration of equity

Subject has been "unfairly" rewarded		Subject has been "unfairly" not rewarded
Ss. N.	Suggestions	Ss. N.
/	He denounces it	/
/	" keeps silent	/
/	"akkm imposes distribution	/
/	" asks reward for h himself	1
/	" shares	/

Table XV

Reward to the child in situation "e"

~~Table XV~~

Fair	Unfair	Doubtful	
Ss. N.	Ss.N.	Ss. N.	Tot. Ss.
4	8	0	12

Table XVI

Motivations for defining equity or iniquity

	Ss. N.
Merit	3
Protection	0
Aknwldgement of power	1
Criterion rejected	7
No answer (DK)	2
	12

Table XVII

Restoration of equity

Subject has been "unfairly" rewarded

Ss. N.	Suggestions	Ss. N.
/	He denounces it	1
/	" keeps silent	1
/	" imposes distribution	4
/	" asks rewards for himself	1
6	" shares	
1	" no answer (DK)	1

Subjects has been "unfairly" non rewarded

Discussion

Nothwistanding our being aware of the restricted number of examined subjects,data allow us to make some preliminary observations. We want, first of all, to underline the change which occurs in criteria of rewarding when children move from the individual evaluation condition to the in-group one. At the individual level merit criterion is privileged and seems to be an accepted value. In the group condition cooperation criterion is being privileged. We wonder whether group pressure, leading toward peer conformity, might have revealed how conflictual merit criterion may be. And we wonder too, whether the experimental condition we designed, might have enhanced an anti-competitive behaviour.

During the "picture interview", children are being brought back to a condition of individual judgement which is analogous to the one actually experienced during the first part of the experimental design. In such condition, merit criterion is being once again chosen by children and reward on the merit basis is being defined as an equity condition.

Reward given to the oldest boy is considered by almost all subjects unfair. Criterion is not being accepted. And it may be interesting to note that, out of the two children who judge such criterion as fair, one motivates his choice on the basis of the aknowledged power of the oldest boy as such. For what concerns equity restoration, almost all children suggest a fair distribution in terms of sharing, especially in the hypothetical situations of being unfairly rewarded.

Viceversa few children perceive iniquity in the situation in which the youngest child is being rewarded. Again, restoration of equity (in those cases in which the subjects considered their being rewarded as unfair) is reached through a behaviour of positive justice . Such strategy for equity restoration is followed in all the subsequent situations.

In situation "d" , in which reward is being given to the child who made "nice drwaings", again an achievement criterion is being suggested: in

such situation large majority of subjects aknowldge the fairness of merit reward.

In the last situation in which reward is being given to a girl as such, majority of children perceive the situation as a non-equity condition. Yet four children accept such unusual criterion, but only one, (a girl) aknowldges sex privilege, the remaining three going back to merit criterion ("the girls know how to draw better" etc.).

As a final consideration it is possible to observe that data concerning individual judgement vary when age variable is being considered.

Both in experimental and in "picture interview " conditions, majority of younger children choose merit criterion for distributing rewards. Protection criterion, on the contrary, is being privileged by elder children. Such data seem to be of difficult interpretation. As a matter of fact, merit criterion refers to norms and values accepted where achievement is emphasized, the protection criterion which seems to be referable to ascription values should be a more primitive process. Yet if we define the perception of the merit criterion as the simplest to be caught ("he more more drawings a he deserves more candies "), the ascriptive criterion takes the meaning of a progress in the knowledge of the situation and of its components.

In such explanation our data seem to confirm what is known in psychological literature about the continuity of social knowledge and moral judgement in children.